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*Noah im kalten Krieg: Igor Strawinsky's
Musical Play "The Flood." by Hannah Dübgen*

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Noah im Kalten Krieg. Igor Strawinskys Musical Play »The Flood«. By Hannah Dübgen.

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€29.95.] Music examples, facsimiles, bibliography, endnotes. In German.

Noah im Kalten Krieg presents a variety of interpretations and insights regarding a single work: Igor Stravinsky's *The Flood*, composed for a CBS television broadcast in 1962. Each of Hannah Dübgen's eight chapters approaches the piece from a different angle, marshaling evidence from source material, music analysis, secondary sources, and published statements by Stravinsky (with Robert Craft), to sketch a series of narratives about how the work might be understood. The introduction poses the question, "Why did Stravinsky compose a work of music theater on the subject of the story of Noah's Ark at the beginning of the 1960's in America?" (13). Dübgen's title gives a clue to her answer: the Cold War is the overarching interpretive reference point, specifically referring to the connection between the biblical cataclysm presented in *The Flood* and the fear of the atomic bomb (as she quotes Stravinsky, "*The Flood* is also *The Bomb*" (12)). Dübgen argues that the story ought best be considered allegorically, and that the allegory in question is no mere moral abstraction, but is really a kind of contemporary analogy. The best moments of the book are those that tie back to this allegory by integrating a discussion of modern musical techniques with questions of theology and dramatic tradition.

Intriguingly given the political charge of her interpretive framework, the Bärenreiter series in which this monograph appears is focused on "music sociology," and Dübgen quotes as her epigraph Charles M. Joseph's epilogue to *Stravinsky Inside Out*, which calls attention to "a more expansive, more humanistic context" (Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001], 269). While Joseph's own chapter on *The Flood* is filled with interesting contextual details, personal reflections, and insights from correspondence, readers seeking a

similar focus in Dübgen's book – e.g., thick history, cultural reception, a study of the influence of larger social and artistic systems on the work – will find such topics confined to the last twelve pages of the volume. This is perhaps disappointing, as the bomb allegory she favors is so particular in its political and cultural resonances, which could have been more comprehensively explored. It was interesting, however, to read her analysis of the fraught and even ironic dynamic between television (as mass media) and the marketing of *The Flood* as a major cultural event involving persons of aesthetic importance (103-106).

After a synopsis of *The Flood* and a summary of basic information, Dübgen sketches out several different possible paths, many of which have the potential to lead to other fruitful work on the piece. Integrating music analysis into hermeneutics is a challenging task, and Dübgen executes it with confidence and flair. Dübgen's discussion of the piece's opening passages demonstrates her analytical method, which connects musical features (in this case, the structure of the opening "chaos" chord) to the "semantics" or significance created by those musical features (35-42). One particularly concentrated chapter, with similarly astute attention to both musical content and dramatic significance, discusses the "antipodes" of God and Lucifer both musically and theologically, connecting their exaggerated characterizations to the difficulty of "sacralizing" a modern drama that has secular, contemporary resonances (64-70). Also illuminating is her discussion of the music of *The Flood* in light of other Stravinsky works that are "ritualized" (*Les Noces*) or that have elements of "religious narrative" (*The Rake's Progress*), which raises interesting problems about the connection between profane dramatic genres and religious content (71-83). The second half of the same chapter, however, is a flyover discussion of so many other works (the *Mass*, the *Canticum Sacrum*, the *Symphony of Psalms*, the *Requiem Canticles*, and *Threni*) that it became difficult to perceive as an integrated argument.

Dübgen organizes much of her material around questions of genre, questioning the ways in which *The Flood*, with all of its diverse elements, fits into different categories (e.g., as an opera, as a mystery play, as a religious ritual, as a televised event). A brief overview of the genre history of the mystery play, for example, grounds Dübgen's observations about the modern and highly delineated character drama of *The Flood*'s term "musical play," which alludes to and borrows from opera, theater, dance, and ritual action (25-31). Regarding the importance of the last, Dübgen questions whether Stravinsky's musical language can be considered a kind of composed "theology." Paraphrasing Carl Dahlhaus at length, she makes an interesting refinement to his critique of *The Flood* as "artificial" (*Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper* [Munich: Piper, 1989], 221), positing that "a heterogenous, concentrated, and in this sense artificial aesthetic granted Stravinsky the possibility to allude to other musical styles and eras... without citing them directly" and going on to argue that such allusions (e.g. to church music) are the necessary semantic component of a successful, meaningful allegory (30).

All of these strands of insight are important, not just because they provide new ideas about what Stravinsky may have done to load *The Flood* with religious and cultural meaning, but because of the generalizable ideas Dübgen advances regarding modern music theater's debt to the vestigial systems of meaning from earlier forms of drama. Least convincing in this context, then, is the seventh chapter, which is the section most closely focused on Stravinsky's serial technique (92-100). Here, Dübgen relies heavily on sources by Manfred Karallus and Andrew Kuster without applying their analytical models to her own interpretive ends. Moreover, Dübgen's bibliographic frame of reference seems rather narrow throughout, as she cites relatively little of the extensive Anglophone work concerned with Stravinsky's serial process or late style; if it was required for her dissertation that she summarize the existing scholarship on

the mechanics of Stravinsky's music, she might have done so in a more comprehensive way that foregrounded competing narratives or historiographical claims.

While some primary research presented here derives from the time spent at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, only a few of these documents are used as illustration and there is little work here on questions of compositional process, sketches, versions, or revisions. In her Sacher Stiftung research, Dübgen follows in an esteemed tradition of musicologists who have carefully pored over the Stravinsky archives, research which has resulted in a vast literature, including work specifically concerned with *The Flood* by Lynne Rogers ("A Serial Passage of Diatonic Ancestry in Stravinsky's *The Flood*, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129, no. 2 [2004], 220-239), which is not cited. Dübgen's most effective use of original source material is in her examination of the typescript libretto, which serves as evidence for a point about Craft's and Stravinsky's differing tendencies regarding the work's "moral/didactic" message (83-85).

Dübgen's name will be familiar to devoted followers of new opera or to acolytes of New York's new music scene: in addition to her studies and activities in the fields of musicology, philosophy, literature, and dramaturgy, she has written poetry, a novel, dramatic works, and libretti, including that for Toshio Hosokawa's *Matsukaze*, which was recently presented by the Talea Ensemble at the Lincoln Center Festival. Readers who are acquainted with or curious about Dübgen's creative work in contemporary music theater may find that this monograph grants some insight into her aesthetic orientation, in that her interest in genre and her approach to analyzing the symbolic relationship between music and drama are both founded in questions that continue to resonate with even the most up-to-date operatic efforts.

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